

ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis: DIVINATION METHOD

Felicia Rose Glidden, Master of Fine Arts, 2012

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Department of Fine Art

This thesis involves turning over internal images and narration of the mind. The work expands the gap between the seen and unseen and engages intuition through an immersion of the senses. This nonlinear approach with no beginning and no end parallels the experience of memory and creates sensorial connectivity.

DIVINATION METHOD

by

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Dedication

In memory of
Grandma Dorothy Ann Redmond
and the Six Hundred and Twenty Nine
Ancestors in my Family Tree

Acknowledgments

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Chapter 1: Memory

"[like] ultraviolet rays, memory shows to each one in the book of life a script that invisibly, as a prophesy, glossed the text." "...yet all the power of internalized existence stems finally from memory"

Walter Benjamin

"All in all, the creative act is not performed by the artist alone; the spectator brings the work in contact with the external world by deciphering and interpreting its inner qualification and thus adds his contribution to the creative act"

Marcel Duchamp

The early Fluxes movement dematerialized art. 'Event scores' "...could be performed in the mind as thought" (Munroe). Yoko Ono's 1963 *Tape Piece I* states: *"Stone Piece. Tape the sound of a stone aging."* *Tape Piece III* reads *"Take a tape of the sound of the snow falling. This should be done in the evening. Do not listen to the tape. Cut it and use it as strings to tie gifts with."* This work is written as instructions, or commands that requires the viewer to contemplate the spatial quality of sound. Is the viewer to take action or is the contemplation of the request the 'work'?

In the installation *Divination Method* (figures 2, 3, 9), white bricks made of paper and steel are flooded in moving light. The installation is performative on many levels. I read aloud twenty-seven dream sequences over the low resonance of church bells. The viewer is contained in the narrative metaphorically and physically as projected light dances across the forms at a glacial pace. I am both present in voice, and absent in body, and this parallels the narration's relationship to the visual elements. Descriptive events occur throughout the 32-minute narrative, although no personal names are used (with the exception of the young girl named Lola Bell, a nod to Laurie Anderson's dog.)

I place all my possessions on my body.

His whole life is lived in imagination, and they do what they can to encourage him, so he can live his dreams.

The boy was too much like his father and at such a young age.

Divination method: Put a piece of fabric in your mouth. Bite it to make an impression. Put it in a petri dish.

I'm driving with my brother through the woods and see a young tiger. I am astonished but everyone else is like "yeah. Looks like a young tiger."

A young girl lies on the side of the road. A man had cut her legs across the top of her ankles. An old man lies on the road next to her with his head at her head. He tries to put paste in her eyes I grab her and stand her up and say, "Please stand up Lola Bell, it's time." She doesn't have strength in her legs. She won't stand, she keeps buckling under legs, or rather she leans back with her legs straight as if she were a doll.

I have a rifle. Crowds of people leave the city. I ask where they are going. Towards the water. I head to the supply room. I grab pickles and look for other food and water. The people on the run are being targeted for their race.

In the morning light I hold the dreams from the night before. This moment of consciousness upon waking is a collapse of space and time as I follow a string of memory into the intangible. In performing this daily ritual over time, it became apparent that this salient material is a rich resource, having recognized these writings are a place where my voice is strong, clear, and sure, and a complement to the physical aspects of my visual art practice. Recording the dreams as audio files, and presenting them alongside visual forms creates an interactive environment as it engages the senses. In the process, I do not judge, edit or change the material as it comes in, and writing it is similar to dictating events of the mind.

An influential artist whose works immerse the viewer is Laurie Anderson. A pioneering performing artist who infuses her sets with projected images and texts, Anderson brings the viewer through a journey of the mind using metaphor and mythological references. Anderson performed *Delusion* (figure 1) at the University of Maryland in 2010. Using her voice as the main character layered with the image of water running down a window, Anderson instills a sense of longing mixed with sorrow, or perhaps regret. She is unafraid to shine a light on shadow aspects of the parent-child relationship, and her work exposes truth in the sentiment, “the personal is political.”ⁱ While travelling through her performance, the line between emotions and the mind is obfuscated. This blurring of boundaries is something I strive to manifest in my work.



Figure 1. *Delusion* still photo by Leland Brewster 2011

The Beginning of Memory

*There's a story in an ancient play about
birds called The Birds
And it's a short story from before the world
began
From a time when there was no earth, no
land.
Only air and birds everywhere.
But the thing was there was no place to
land.
Because there was no land.
So they just circled around and around.
Because this was before the world began.
And the sound was deafening. Songbirds
were everywhere.
Billions and billions and billions of birds.
And one of these birds was a lark and one
day her father died.
And this was a really big problem because
what should they do with the body?
There was no place to put the body
because there was no earth.
And finally the lark had a solution.
She decided to bury her father in the back
of her own head.
And this was the beginning of memory.
Because before this no one could
remember a thing.
They were just constantly flying in circles.
Constantly flying in huge circles.*

Laurie Anderson



Figure 2. *Divination Method* (detail), 2012



Figure 3. *Divination Method*, 2012

Chapter 2: Sound

"I do not consider sound as separate from image. We usually think of the camera as an 'eye' and the microphone as an 'ear' but all the senses exist simultaneously in our bodies, interwoven into one system that includes sensory data, neural processing, memory, imagination and all of the mental events of the moment. This all adds up to create the larger phenomenon we call experience. This is the raw material, the medium with which I work."

"In the nature of the use of chance operations is the belief that all answers answer all questions."

John Cage

Bill Viola

My work addresses a transitional moment between states of being, e.g., the moment just before falling asleep where images start to form in the mind, the moment just after waking, where the activities from the dreams disorient, or the confusion of déjà vu, intuition, and a type of recall; a thought below the surface of two or three other thoughts that cannot be brought to the forefront of the mind. An altered state is generated within controlled lighting of dark interior spaces using olfactory triggers with audio as the primary medium to thread together the various components.

As a means of exploring these liminal moments; I've worked through a series of three different major works: *Immersion*, *En Route 32*, and *Divination Method*.

Immersion (figure 4) was an installation at the Herman Meril Gallery at the University of Maryland. A hexagon shaped room had speakers built into the walls, painted dark brown, with no lighting but for faint lights on the stairs leading down into the space. The floor was covered with sand, which directly affected the acoustics of the room. The 5.1 surround sound had many layers of sounds: crickets, bells, a water fountain, and singing.

The spoken text referenced water in many forms: ice, rivers, sinks, snow, lakes and flooded rooms. Multiple voices were layered on various channels within the space, yet distinct threads of narration could be singled out by moving close to individual speakers. The ideal location to listen to the piece was on a blanket, lying in the middle of the space. The voices and sounds echoed the nature and complexity of memory— its tenuous and shifting elusiveness. Basil and peppermint oils were sprinkled into the sand, creating an olfactory sensation. The piece was meant to heighten the sensory experience by removing the visual element and engulfing the viewer in darkness. The sand on the floor echoes the threshold at the water's edge, but also implies a shifting boundary, a calm uncertainty.



Figure 4 *Immersion* 2010

In the video *En Route* (figures 5, 6), a collaboration with musician Alain Wozniak, we incorporated binaural beats into the soundtrack and brought the sound waves to 10 Hz. This induced an alpha state of meditative alertness in the viewer. The subject of this work is the road, and it contains audio narration about the road, while bringing the viewer through the landscape: airplanes over Switzerland, roadways of Germany, and alongside rivers in Minnesota.



Figures 5, 6. *En Route* video stills 2011

Chapter 3: The Landscape

“Black water is sexy. What is water? What do you know about water? Only that it’s everywhere differently. Disappearance: that’s why suicides are attracted to it. / You can’t talk about water without talking about oneself. Down at the river I shot my baby.”

Roni Horn

Landscape encapsulates a number of undercurrents. Themes of elemental forces, transportation infrastructure, our relationship with nature, and chance are woven throughout. I lived in a cabin in Minnesota’s the Northern Boreal Forest near the shore of Lake Superior for 20 years. My experience in the landscape has had a profound influence on my work. This is primarily manifested in my regard for the environment, choice of materials, textural surface treatments, and an internalization of the immense scale. These forests and fresh waters of northern Minnesota are threatened by global warming. Consequently, a slow but significant migration of the Boreal Forest is predicted to move deep into Canada as the Oak Savannah moves north, and with it, birds, animals and entire ecosystems shift. I saw evidence of this through the lessening snowfalls, warming temperatures, and birch, pine and spruce tree diseases. This March, the United States saw record high temperatures across the nation, as noted by Meteorologist Paul Douglas, “Ham Weather reports 6,895 records in the last week – some towns 30 to 45 degrees warmer than average; *off-the-scale, freakishly warm*. 13,393 daily records for heat since March 1 – 16 times more warm records than cold records. The scope, intensity and

duration of this early heat wave are historic and unprecedented.” The impact and significance of this cannot be overlooked or understated.

There has been a worldwide epidemic of bees disappearing from their hives. I directly addressed the changing landscape in the sound piece *His words were sweet like hone*. (figure 7). The sweet smell of the beeswax permeates the room; the connection to the bees becomes palpable through smell. The sound’s base note of bees humming is layered against international voices talking about the road and cars, interspersed with my own dreams about cars. The car as vehicle travelling through life is explored in the beeswax and steel structure. A BMW aluminum tire rim serves as the chair. This work was made just after the British Petroleum oil spill in the Gulf of Mexicoⁱⁱ. In this work, I was questioning our relationship with automobiles and the nostalgia of the ‘road-trip’. A great many of my dreams involve travelling in a vehicle. I clearly see my culpability in the use of oil and related petroleum products.



Figure 7 *His words were sweet like honey*, 2010

Chapter 4: Beginning

“live in the space between chaos and shape. I walk the line that continually threatens to lose its tautness under me, dropping me into the dark pit where there is no meaning. At other times the line is so wired that it lights up the soles of my feet, gradually my whole body, until I am my own beacon, and I see then the beauty of newly created worlds, a form that is not random. A new beginning.....”

Jeanette Winterson

Cloud Rust (figure 8) is a meditation on beginnings, time, and place in the landscape, incorporating chance and sound with the visual imagery of transportation infrastructure, movement, and the sky. The clouds are continuous and reveal a speeding up of time as the sun rises in seven minutes across the screen. It was my first use of vehicles, the train, and the sound layered under the narrative. This work incorporated sound recorded on the streets and subways of New York City. The narrative contains a section of text from *The First Line From Every Dream*.ⁱⁱⁱ It is about the story’s beginning, which usually involves the setting, only this story is a continual beginning, which is disorienting and distills a sense of chaos.



Figure 8 *Cloud Rust* video stills 2010

The video component in *Divination Method* (figure 9) contains elements shot in the landscape, revealing sharp blue skies, pink cherry blossoms, and flowing water. The steady force of wind is indicated throughout. It embodies time as affected by forces of nature. There is an inclination to look for obvious connections to the audio, while the video creates an infusion of color and slow movement. I want the viewer to discover a possible entry into a meditative landscape.

Projected images flood the space with moving light. Hue and saturation bend at a slow and metered pace. The series contains a set of images of paintings. Brightly saturated colors are muted by veils of neutrals. Thought behind thought, layers of metaphor conceal meaning, mystery and intrigue. These images, projected on handmade paper, create moving veils as light permeates the form.

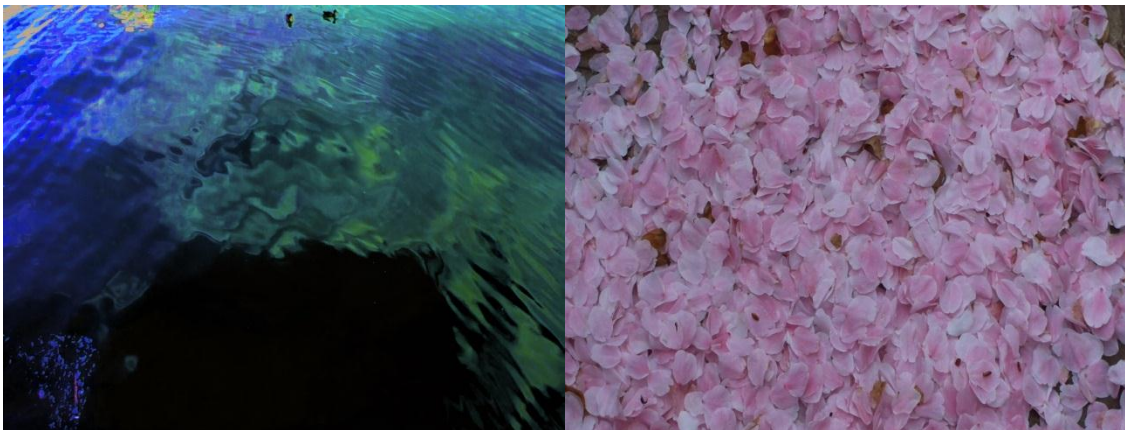


Figure 9 *Divination Method* video stills 2012

Chapter 4: Maria

"I do not promise to make you happy in this world, but in the next."

Our Lady of Lourdes^{iv}

My art is the way I reestablish the bonds that unite me to the Universe. It is a return to the maternal source.

Ana Mendieta

My research into my family's history led to a pilgrimage to the area in Bohemia where my maternal grandmother's family lived before immigrating to the midwest United States. I am fascinated by my maternal grandmother's faith and continual daily practice of the saying the Rosary. She brought me to Necedah, which is near the location where her relatives settled when they came here from Czechoslovakia. This also led me to research my entire family tree in which I discovered twelve generations of ancestors going back to several locations in Europe. The one commonality is Catholicism.

I visited sacred sites where Mary has appeared such as: Montserrat, Spain , Svata Hora in Pribram, Czechoslovakia, and the controversial site in Necedah, Wisconsin.^v In response to the heritage of faith, ritual and belief in the unknown became a focus. The Catholic Church officially acknowledges that Mary appears to followers in visions.^{vi} Do we need to see to believe or does faith reside internally? Is it something of the mind, or does it run through the blood as passed down by our ancestors? I believe that the prevalence of Mary in the Catholic religion possibly feeds an ancient desire to connect with the sacred feminine. My work with the iconic images of Mary has become a way to connect with my spiritual lineage.

An early and lasting influence is the work of Ana Mendieta. Much of her art is made in the landscape, especially along river beds. She created female forms carved and modeled into the earth, sometimes using fire or flowers, and often clay. My work builds on her work through the use of a single female form, and a ritual-like quality in the process of making.



Figure 10 Ana Mendieta photograph Iowa, 1978

In 2005, I was in Chicago, Illinois and came across a shrine under a freeway pass. It was ten days after Pope John Paul II had died and the salt stain runoff from the freeway above had created a veiled image of Mary (figure 11). This incident of a salt stain received national press and drew a crowd.^{vii} Believers lit candles, touched the wall and took pictures with cell phones, while the police had to barricade the sidewalk to protect

them from nearby traffic. I have long been interested in photographing staining on steel bridges and buildings where water and wind leave marks. The series of recent paintings stems directly from an aesthetic response and my questions about the iconic power of Mary in contemporary culture. The photos, upon which the paintings (figures 12, 13, & 14) were built, were taken in churches and city streets in Germany, Czechoslovakia, Italy, France and Switzerland in the past two years. Images of the paintings are included in the video projection in *Divination Method*.

The making of the steel and paper forms parallels the daily ritual practice of the rosary, praying for perfection, forgiveness, professing belief. Attempting perfection, I cut the steel and weld together the form. The making becomes both the penance and the prayer. The paper becomes the body, which is permeable and frail on the surface, like faith.



Figure 11 *Salt Stain Mary* 2005



Figure 12 *Venice Mary 15* 2012



Figure13 *Black Mary I*, 2011

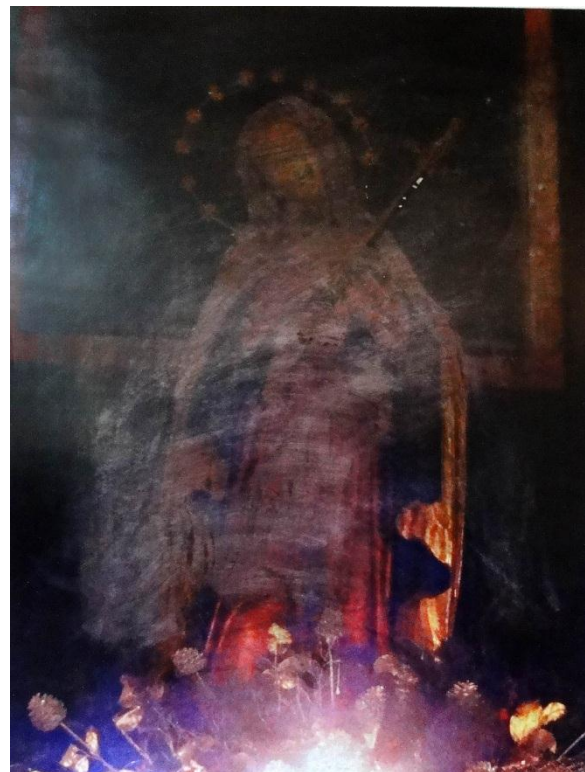


Figure 14 *Ulm Mary*2011

Chapter 5: Dark and Light

A work will only have deep resonance if the kind of darkness I can generate is something that is resident in me already.

Anish Kapoor

The void, the darkness that is darker than a moonless night is rich with possibility. This darkness invites a sliver of light to reveal its secrets—a glacial pace heightens movement. These extremes states invite my attention. Dark settings for the installations, *Immersion* and *Divination Method* echo the dark of night, as well as the deep recesses of the mind— where divination occurs. It is in this uncertainty, this place behind consciousness, just before the dawn where intuition lives.

In 2009, I experienced Anish Kapoor's darkness in *Memory* (figure 15). Installed in the Guggenheim Museum, the piece could not be seen in its entirety due to its proximity to the walls in the space. Three entrances gave partial views, and I was drawn entirely to the interior view which was seen through a square cut into the drywall which revealed a velvety black interior. The square becomes a surface then a void—an illusion of space. I spent a long time looking into the void, which slowly revealed a faint hint of the interior egg-like form. As my eyes adjusted the color became a deep indigo.



Figure 15 Anish Kapoor, *Memory*, 2009

I worked in collaboration with dancer / choreographer Sharon Mansur, for her solo improvisational work *Cimmerian Light* (figure 16). I designed and built the set for her 2011 performance in the Clarice Center for Performing Arts. She based her movements on the Japanese concept of wabi-sabi beauty in imperfection and on dream phrases that I had given her involving darkness and light:

"I am looking at a drawing I made, trying to remember if I used black paper or charcoal to make the background a rich dark black.

I am trying to arrange a clear working spot for her and pointing out the dancers after dark, the nooks to catch an ankle on the crowded stairs the interior of the building is dark

I'm rounding the corner to Arden's and am struck by the quality of light on the houses and a wind picks up and comes towards me

There is a brilliant light reflecting off the side of the building.

I see an amazing light strike his face and ask him to hand me the camera

He looks like someone else every time light runs up the side of his face."

The primary structure, made of steel and rubber, resembled the exoskeleton and skin falling off the bone. Lighting by designer Andrew Dorman was incorporated into the structures, and the set included steel mesh which echoed the steel wire cloak designed by Tzveta Kassabova. The final effect was a quiet meditation on impermanence in a mildly chaotic landscape.



Figure 16 *Cimmerian Light* 2011

This thesis is a culmination of a long arch of subject development and training as a visual artist. I have been making art since 1986. I have worked with photography, painting, and trained in modern dance, all of which continues to inform the color, movement, spatial relationships and theatrical qualities of my installations. I often choose to place the viewer between or inside of structures. This is a conscious attempt to give the viewer the opportunity to be both audience and performer, albeit in a passive position, encouraging him or her to enter a meditative place to receive the work. As a dancer I felt the most compelling action happened inside of the body, and wondered if the viewer could see the subtle dynamics as they occurred. A dancer's movement is elusive, as is the spoken word, except where it resides in memory. This push-pull between elusive time-based art and an object's existence in space continues its allure.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

Divination Method weaves together the themes of my work into a cohesive experiential installation. Weaving together threads of traditional material handling (steel fabrication, paper making) with new technology (digital video and sound), mirrors my interest in linking the past with the present. One method for building this bridge is involving the senses of a physical experience, while the mind wanders through a metaphoric narrative. Another, is the light permeating and shining through the thin fragile paper. The stacked steel and paper fractures the light defining the directions of space: vertical, horizontal, and sagittal. They are stacked architectural building blocks with bones of steel, each revealing its handmade individuality in a conformist environment; always the same size, yet the final form has infinite potentiality.

Veils of color and light in the paintings and projection also contain this potentiality in searching for that which lies below the surface. I waded through my ancestral and spiritual heritage while looking at other artists work. Traveling to historic cities and churches of Europe in combination with visiting contemporary art galleries and museums in New York City and Washington D.C., fed my intense hunger for a visual and intellectual culture with deep roots.

Endnotes

ⁱ This phrase which is now widely used, was originally the title of an essay during the early feminist movement by Carol Hanisch published in *Notes from the Second Year: Women's Liberation*. The author claims the title *The Personal is Political* was coined by the editors Shulie Firestone and Anne Koedt in 1970.

ⁱⁱ On April 20th 2010, An explosion on a British Petroleum deep water oil well exploded killing 11 people on the platform and ruptured the cap on the well. The well leaked oil from April 22 until July 15th when it was capped. It is estimates that 205.8 million gallons flowed into the Gulf of Mexico.

ⁱⁱⁱ In 2010, I reviewed 25 years of dream journals and created a document of the first line from every dream. I worked with this document for various video and sound projects. The beginning of the dream often contains the setting, or primary themes.

^{iv} This is name for the Virgin Mary recognized by the church to appear as an apparition near Lourdes France. On February 11th, 1858 Bernadette Soubirous, a peasant girl told her mother that a “lady” spoke to her. The Pope Pius XI canonized Bernadette as a saint in Catholic Church. Lourdes France is one of the most visited Marian Shrines with more than five million Pilgrims visits annually.

^v The Queen of the Holy Rosary, Mediatrix of Peace Shrine is a Marion Shrine in Necedah Wisconsin. Between November 2nd, 1949 and October 7th, 1950, Mary Ann Van Hoof (1909-1984) reportedly received nine visions of Mary and was in a state of ecstasy. The church has never recognized the validity of these visions and in 1955, Bishop John Treacy the Bishop of LaCrosse, WI officially declared the visions of Mary Ann Van

Hoof false, and prohibited worship. Van Hoof subsequently left the Roman Catholic Church and became affiliated with the Old Catholic Church,. My Grandparents visited this shrine annually and supported the church being built on the site.

^{vi} Called theophanies in religious terms, Marian apparitions are events where the Virgin Mary is believed to have appeared supernaturally to one or more people. The Church has a set of criteria to determine validity based on both positive and negative criteria. The Vatican recognizes very few reported visitations. After a rigorous review process, the officially confirmed apparitions are the sites in: Guadalupe (1531), Saint-Etienne-le-Laus, Rue du Bac, Paris(1830), ,Miraculous Medal (1842), La Salette (1846), Lourdes (1858), Fatima (1917), Pontmain (1871), Beauraing (1932) and Banneux (1933).

^{vii} In April of 2005 Chicago resident Obdulia Delgado was driving by the Fullerton underpass of the Kennedy expressway, and saw in the salt runoff an image of the Virgin Mary. Subsequently, a shrine was established at the walls and many believers continue to visit the shrine even after it has been painted over and over. Dubbed “Our Lady of the Underpass”, it continues to be a roadside shrine full of with flowers, candles and many messages to the Virgin written on the wall. The incident has received a great deal of national and international press — the BBC covered the story including photographs on April 21st, 2005.

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